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SUBJECT: ANOTHER RIGHT WING MAKEOVER - PARTY OF RIGHTS
COURTS DIPLOMATS

REF: ZAGREB 418

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph Frank for reasons 1.5 (b) & (d)

[11.](#) (U) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: The Croatian Party of Rights (HSP) re-introduced itself to the international community April 12 as a modern, pro-European, center-right party based on tolerance, democracy, and love of the homeland. At a lunch for diplomats, HSP President Anto Djapic, under the tutelage of recently recruited advisor and Tudjman-era Foreign Minister Mate Granic, issued new party guidelines that support -- among other about-faces -- Euro-Atlantic integration, cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), friendly relations with all neighbors, and the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

[12.](#) (U) Currently polling in third place among political parties, the HSP expects to receive more than ten percent of the vote at local elections on May 15) the best results in party history. Djapic and Granic plan to parlay this expected local success into a share of the national government, and they are campaigning hard to make the HSP more acceptable to the diplomatic corps. PM Ivo Sanader turned the party away when forming his government in 2003 due to international pressure. But with eight parliamentary seats on offer and current coalition partners grumbling, the PM may be hard pressed to resist the HSP's new allure.

[13.](#) (C) Post remains skeptical that the HSP's makeover is more than a thin veneer around the party's leadership in Zagreb. While the will to become moderate may be sincere at the top, it will be difficult for the party to transform its base in the rest of Croatia, where the black shirts of the HSP's fascist past still hang in some closets. Post already can see some daylight between Djapic's lunch rhetoric and the party's behavior in the field. In addition, the HSP has evolved as a party of opposition, never having been in power at the national level and serving only in coalition at the local level. As party president, Djapic is accustomed to saying whatever he pleases without having to follow through or take responsibility. If he succeeds in his quest for a role in government, Djapic will face the true test of his leadership. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

BLACK SHIRTS OFF, PINSTripES ON

[14.](#) (U) The HSP invited ambassadors from all neighboring countries, EU member states and permanent members of the UN Security Council to the April 12 lunch with the party's eight-member presidency, but the diplomatic corps responded cautiously, either declining or sending pinch hitters at the level of first secretary and below. The exceptions among the roughly 25 attendees: the Papal Nuncio and the Chinese Ambassador -- the first due to the Vatican's special relationship with Croatia, the second most likely because he didn't understand the significance of the event.

[15.](#) (U) According to Djapic, the event was intended to fight prejudices against party. He acknowledged the HSP's hard-line war stance during the 1990s and its ties to the Ustashe, supporters of Croatia's WWII fascist puppet state, but stressed that there is no longer any connection. "We are fighting for a better future, not a better past," he said. He condemned all crimes committed by the Ustashe and said he is prepared to pay his respects at nearby Jasenovac to the victims of that notorious Ustashe concentration camp. Granic is also planning a trip for Djapic to Yad Vashem in Israel where he will condemn the Ustashe's WWII crimes. "We should pay our respects to all innocent victims in Croatia," he said, "regardless of whether they were victims of the red side or the black side." However, the HSP opposes manipulation of the number of victims of Jasenovac, which range from 70,000 to 750,000 depending on the political affiliation of the historian. Djapic maintains that Croatia must do more to discover the victims of crimes during the most recent war and sanction the perpetrators.

FOREIGN POLICY FLIP: SUPPORT FOR EU, NATO, ICTY, ETC.

[16.](#) (U) On foreign policy, one of the key areas where the HSP

has alienated the international community, Djapic announced support for Croatia's membership in both the EU and NATO. He noted that the quality of negotiations connected with EU entry are more important than the speed, and criticized the GoC's EU-centric outlook, stressing the need for excellent relations with all permanent members of the UNSC, especially the US, China and Russia.

17. (U) According to Djapic, the party supports friendly relations with all neighbors and believes questions that

cannot be resolved bilaterally should be sent to international arbitration, such as the Piran Bay border dispute with Slovenia. On BiH, the party supports territorial integrity but expects full equality and sovereignty of Croats there. On SaM, Djapic said, "We know what happened between us. We should work to ensure it doesn't happen again" through open dialogue.

18. (U) The HSP is aware of Croatia's international obligations, Djapic said, and supports cooperation with the ICTY. He believes, however, that the GoC has not used all of the legal mechanisms at its disposal to resolve open issues, such as challenging the basis of indictment against fugitive Ante Gotovina.

LOCAL ELECTIONS: SPRINGBOARD TO NATIONAL GOVERNMENT?

19. (C) Djapic claimed the May 15 local elections "will change the political landscape in Croatia, and the HSP will play an important role." Both he and Granic hope that a double digit finish will position them to enter coalition with the ruling Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) in the GoC, as some of PM Sanader's current partners, namely the Independent Serbian Democratic Party (SDSS) and the Croatian Party of Pensioners (HSU), grow more costly and less reliable. The HSP is open to cooperation with all other parties with the exception of the SDSS, as some members of its leadership participated directly in the war against Croatia (for example, SDSS president Vojislav Stanimirovic was a minister in the so-called Republika Srpska Krajina).

10. (U) Despite differences with the SDSS, Djapic stressed the party's support for the Constitutional Law on National Minorities, which is designed to protect minority rights and ensure minority representation in government and public administration. The HSP also supports all conventions the GoC has signed related to minorities and expects other countries to equally respect their Croatian minorities.

GRANIC AS PUPPET MASTER -- AND NEXT FOREIGN MINISTER?

11. (C) Djapic could not even attempt to sell this new image without the help of Mate Granic; who, having left the HDZ after Tudjman's death, sees his role as HSP advisor as a ticket back into government. The lunch event and the party guidelines were both clearly scripted by Granic, who knows well from his MFA days what the international community likes to hear. He warned PolOff privately, though, that the HSP would not accept a role in the HDZ government unless the GoC showed commitment to real reforms, including increased economic discipline and replacement of what Granic called incompetent ministers. Of note, Granic includes on his list of "incompetents" Minister of Justice Vesna Skare Ozbolt, popular among the international community for her aggressive judicial reforms. In addition, the SDSS would have to leave government, sending a truly mixed signal to the diplomatic community.

IS THAT A CRACK IN YOUR FACADE OR A CONSISTENCY PROBLEM?

12. (C) It only took one day for HSP behavior to conflict with Djapic's lunchtime rhetoric, and we expect more examples are on the way. A declaration supporting anti-fascism caused a stir in the Parliament in early April when deputies could not agree on language to mark the 60th anniversary of the fall of Hitler's Nazis. Djapic told diplomats that the original declaration equated anti-fascism to communism under which notorious crimes were also committed, but said the HSP would support a new, jointly drafted declaration. However, the party abstained when the declaration came to a vote, feebly arguing that the new declaration did not condemn the crimes of the communist regime.

13. (C) Even HSP Vice-President Tonci Tadic expressed doubts to PolOff about the chances of the party emerging as truly reformed, pointing to new members with big money but questionable ethics. The HSP's newfound popularity is like a sponge, Tadic said. "You squeeze it, then it sucks up all the dirty water."

FRANK

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